DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 601 PS 016 562

AUTHOR Adams-Price, Carolyn; Greene, A. L.
TITLE Projected Attachments and Self-Concept Development during Adolescence.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Child Development (Baltimore, MD, April 23-26, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Age Differences; *Attachment Behavior; Attribution Theory; Children; *Identification (Psychology); *Self Concept; Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS *Celebrities; *Projection (Psychology); Salience

ABSTRACT

Incorporating Elkind's (1979) construct of the personal fable, this investigation focused on the relationship between self-concept and projected attachments to a distant object (i.e., a favorite celebrity). In a repeated measures design, 79 male and female 5th, 8th, and 11th graders and college sophomores completed a set of personality scales, first describing themselves and later describing the favorite celebrity. Repeated measures MANOVAS of self-object congruence revealed no significant main or interaction effects for the type of attachment projected (i.e., identificatory versus romantic), sex or age of subject, or sex of attachment object. Significant within-subject differences were obtained for the repeated measures factor 'self/object congruence,' indicating a significant divergence in the perception of self and the attachment object. Although different types of attachment were projected by males and females, these data suggest that the functions served by such attachments may be quite similar. Findings are discussed in light of Erikson's (1950) description of the function of romantic attachments during adolescence, particularly for adolescent females, and Gilligan's (1982) distinction between "masculine" and "feminine" definitions of self. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED283601

Projected Attachments and Self Concept Development During Adolescence[1]

Carolyn Adams-Price and A. L. Greene[2]

West Virginia University

[1] Poster presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research on Child Development, Baltimore, MD. April 26-28, 1987.

[2] Department of Psychology, P. O. Box 6040, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506-6040

RUNNING HEAD: Projected Attachments

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Carolyn Adams-Price
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 016562

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Incorporating Elkind's (1979) construct of the personal fable, this investigation focussed on the relationship between projected attachments to a distant object (i.e., a favorite celebrity) and self concept. In a repeated measures design, 79 male and female 5th, 8th, and 11th graders and college sophomores completed a set of personality scales, first describing themselves and later, describing the favorite celebrity. Repeated Measures MANOVAs of self-object congruence revealed no significant main or interaction effects for the type of attachment projected (i.e., identificatory vs. romantic), sex or age of subject, or sex of attachment object. Significant within-subject differences were obtained for the repeated measures factor (self-object congruence), indicating a significant divergence in the perception of self and the attachment object. Although different types of attachment were projected by males and females, these data suggest that the functions served by such attachments may be quite similar. The findings are discussed in light of Erikson's (1950) description of the function of romantic attachments during adolescence, particularly for adolescent females, and Gilligan's (1982) distinction between "masculine" and "feminine" definitions of self.

Projected Attachments and Self-Concept Development during Adolescence

Projected attachments to distant figures are a popular theme in the literature on adolescence (Landis, 1980; Muus, 1980). Colloquially known as "crushes," projected attachments are defined here as the intimate relationship fantasized to exist between the adolescent and a distant figure. Characteristic of projected attachments are the feelings of identification or romanticism associated with the attachment figure/object and frequent fantasies in which the personal qualities of that individual are greatly enhanced or idealized (Fromm, 1967).

Defined in this manner, projected attachments are thought to be an important aspect of early adolescence, which permit the exploration and consolidation of sexual and social identity or self concept, at a safe remove from immediate experience and consequence (Erikson, 1950; Freud, 1925; Fromm, 1967; Landis, 1980). Although intriguing, this suggestion has yet to receive empirical attention.

As part of a larger investigation of self concept development in adolescence, this study examined the degree of congruence between the attributed characteristics of the attachment object and the self reported personality characteristics of the adolescent (i.e., self-object congruence).

Method

Sample

Seventy-nine caucasian students participated in this study: 10 male and 10 female 5th graders (xage = 10.5 yrs); 10 male and 10 female 8th graders (xage = 13.4 yrs); 10 male and 10 female 11th graders (xage = 16.2 yrs); and 10 male and 10 female college sophomores (xage = 19.3 years).

Procedure

Participants were tested in small groups of 5 to 10 each, in classrooms at their respective schools. Following a brief description of the purpose and procedures of the study, each student was given a test protocol and allowed to complete it at their own pace.

Each protocol requested the student to describe a favorite celebrity, including the kind of relationship that they would like to have with the celebrity and the amount of time spent in various activities related to the celebrity (e.g., "How often do you think about your favorite star?" "How often do you talk about your favorite star with your best friend?").

In a repeated measures design, students also completed the PAQ scales (Spence & Helmrich, 1978) describing first themselves and, later in the protocol, the favorite celebrity. At the conclusion of the assessment, each student completed a two page demographic questionnaire.

Results

Data analyses were conducted in sequential fashion to examine: (1) the types of attachment to a favorite celebrity endorsed by the sample; (2) the constellation of personality characteristics attributed to the object of that attachment; (3) the degree of congruence between adolescents' self perceptions and their perceptions of the attachment object; and (4) the salience of the projected attachment in adolescents' daily experience. The results of these analyses are presented separately, below.

Categories of Projected Attachment

As shown in Table 1, two categories of projected attachment emerged from these data: identificatory and romantic attachments. Significant sex differences in the type of attachment projected were obtained. Whereas males described identificatory attachments, females preferred romantic ones ($X^2 = 10.07$, $df = 4$, $p < .05$). Grade was unrelated to the type of attachment endorsed ($X^2 = 1.51$, $df = 3$, n.s.)

Insert Table 1 About Here

Characteristics of the Attachment Object

Both males and females overwhelmingly identified males as attachment objects ($X^2 = 30.51$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). A 2 (sex) x 4 (grade) factorial ANOVA indicated significant main effects for grade and sex

in the age of the attachment object. Males identified attachment objects who were significantly older than those described by females (X^2 = 24.28, df = 1/43, $p < .001$), and younger adolescents identified attachment objects who were significantly younger than those identified by older adolescents ($F = 7.25$, df = 3/43, $p < .001$). No significant interaction effects were obtained ($F = 0.11$, df = 3/36, n.s.).

Table 2 presents the mean PAQ scores obtained for attachment objects. As shown there, students generally perceived the attachment

---

Insert Table 2 About Here

---

object as high in agency ($F = 49.55$, df = 4/82, $p < .001$) and expressivity ($F = 21.16$, df = 2/82, $p < .001$). However, males attributed greater agency to their attachment objects than did females ($F = 7.46$, df = 1/40, $p < .01$).

Self-Object Congruence

Table 3 presents the mean PAQ subscale scores obtained for self and attachment object. Overall, attachment objects were seen as more agentic and expressive than adolescents saw themselves ($F = 8.54$, df = 1/40, $p < .01$ and $F = 25.54$, df = 1/40, $p < .001$). However,

---

Insert Table 3 About Here

---

students perceived themselves and their attachment objects as comparable on the masculinity/femininity subscales ($F = 3.39$, $df = 1/40$, n.s.).

Salience of the Projected Attachment

A series of 2 (sex) x 2 (attachment type) x 4 (grade) ANOVAs was performed to examine the salience of the projected attachment to adolescents' daily experience (e.g., the amount of time spent thinking about the object or discussing the object with friends). Table 5 presents the average time spent in each activity, for the sample as a whole and by grade.

Only age was found to differentiate the salience of the attachment object to the adolescents' daily experience. Younger adolescents reported spending more time thinking about and discussing the attachment object with their peers than older adolescents (i.e., $F = 6.91$, $df\ 3/70$, $p < .001$ and $F = 3.67$, $df\ 3/70$, $p\ .05$, respectively). One sex difference emerged in these analyses: Females reported spending more time discussing the attachment object with their mothers than males ($F = 7.53$, $df = 1/42$, $p < .01$). However, type of projected attachment was unrelated to the amount of time spent in activities related to the attachment object ($F = 2.72$, $df = 1/41$, n.s.).

Discussion

Following our predictions, two forms of projected attachment emerged in this study: romantic and identificatory. And, significant sex differences in type of projected attachment were obtained: males preferred identificatory relationships, whereas females preferred romantic relationships with an attachment object. While it is possible that this finding represents a broader socio-cultural preference for male celebrities, it is equally likely that the pattern reflects the differential socialization of females toward relationships and males toward achievement (Gilligan, 1982).

Seen in this manner, projected attachments arguably serve comparable functions for male and female adolescents, particularly young ones, by providing a safe context and focus for conversation and social exchange. The point of divergence thus becomes gender related differences in the configuration that the attachment assumes. Since males and females both selected males as attachment objects, it seems likely that even fantasied relationships are structured to reflect probable reality: males can "be" the object and females can be the object's love interest. This difference in the configuration of even a projected attachment parallels the distinctions between females greater relatedness and the greater instrumentality of males, drawn by other authors as well (Gilligan, 1983; Spence & Helmreich, 1977).

We also predicted significant self-object congruence, as a function of attachment type. Our findings, however, indicated points of congruence, as well as divergence in self-object perception. Attachment objects were generally seen as agentic, and significantly more agentic than adolescents saw themselves. However, respondents described both themselves and their attachment objects as comparably expressive. Both patterns obtained, independent of the type of attachment projected. The stereotypic object that emerges from these data is not quite the "larger than life" figure described by theory (Erikson, 1950; 1968), but certainly one that is more expansive and more instrumental than adolescents saw themselves.

The findings of this study, although preliminary, are worthy of note. For example, the finding that romantic and identificatory attachments were not the only fantasied relationships described by this sample, indicates an area of further investigation (e.g., it is not clear what the phenomenological significance of being the object's relative vs. being the object might be). Similarly, the finding that the salience of the attachment object was inversely related to age, suggests the need for investigations using younger age groups.

Taken together, however, the findings of this study indicate that projected attachments are an important, if overlooked aspect of adolescent self concept. By no means are these attachments the only or the most critical venue of identity formation, but, as indicated here, they are an important aspect of its development.

References

Davidson, S. (1973). Feeding on dreams in a bubble-gum culture. Atlantic Monthly,, 232, 62-66.

Elkind, D. (1967). Egocentricism in adolescence. Child Development, 38,1025-1034.

Elkind, D. & Bowen, R. (1979). Imaginary audience behavior in children and adolescents. Developmental Psychology, 15, 38-44.

Erikson, E. (1950). Childhood and Society. New York: Norton.

Freud, S. (1925). Three contributions to the sexual theory. Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series, No. 7. New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing.

Fromm, A. (1967). Ability to love. New York: Farrar, Strass, & Giroux.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Muus, R. E. (1980). Theories of adolescence (4th edition). New York: Random House.

Spence, J. & Helmreich, R. (1978). Masculinity and femininity: Their psychological dimension, correlates and antecedents. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Table 1

Percent Distribution of Endorsement for Attachment Categories, Overall[a] and by Sex[b]

	Percent Endorsement		
Attachment Categories	Overall	Males	Females
Be the celebrity	30.4	36.6	23.7
Be the celebrity's romantic partner	25.3	12.2	39.5
Be the celebrity's friend	16.5	17.1	15.8
Be the celebrity's relative	15.2	14.6	15.8
Other	12.7	19.5	5.2

[a] (X^2 = 8.91, df = 4, $p < .05$)

[b] (X^2 = 10.08, df = 4, $p < .05$)

Table 2

Mean PAQ Masculinity, Femininity and Masculinity/Femininity Subscale Scores for Attachment Object, Overall and by Sex

	Mean PAQ Scores			
PAQ Subscales	Overall	Females	Males	F
Masculinity	2.23	2.45	1.90	7.93*
Femininity	3.41	3.52	3.25	1.00
Masculinity/ Femininity	2.60	2.87	2.53	1.71

* $p < .01$

Table 3

Mean PAQ Scores and Standard Deviations for Self and Attachment Object

	Mean PAQ Scores			
	Self	Object	F	p
Masculinity	2.48 (.60)	2.16 (.62)	8.54	.01
Femininity	3.91 (.56)	3.38 (.64)	25.54	.001
Masculinity/ Femininity	2.90 (.75)	2.66 (.75)	3.39	ns

Table 4

Mean Frequency of Time Spent Thinking or Talking About the Attachment Object, Overall and by Grade

	Grade				
	Overall	5th	8th	11th	Sophomores	F
Thinks about object	2.81	4.00	2.18	2.67	2.33	6.91**
Talks with mother	1.29	2.17	1.18	0.75	1.00	3.86*
Talks with father	0.68	0.83	0.64	0.42	0.89	0.22
Talks with siblings	1.52	1.58	1.81	1.42	1.22	0.69
Talks with best friend	2.30	2.58	2.64	1.92	2.00	0.92
Talks with one other friend	1.61	1.67	2.10	1.75	1.44	2.15
Talks with several friends	1.57	1.58	2.00	1.42	1.22	2.63

* $p < .05$